

CASE 3630

CORCORACIDAE Mathews, 1927 (Aves) and the spelling *melanorhamphos* Vieillot, 1817 for the valid name of the type species of its type genus: proposed conservation of usage

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Abstract. The purpose of this application, under Articles 81.1, 81.2.3.2, 23.9.3 and 33.3.1 of the Code is to (1) conserve the family name CORCORACIDAE Mathews, 1927 for the Australian bird family known as mudnesters; and (2) conserve *melanorhamphos* Vieillot, 1817 as the correct spelling of the valid name for the type species of the type genus of CORCORACIDAE. At family or subfamily rank, CORCORACIDAE has been in prevailing use for the mudnesters for over 50 years. Reversal of precedence for the competing name STRUTHIDEIDAE Mathews, 1924 under Article 81.2.3.2 of the Code will maintain stability in nomenclature. The species-group name *melanorhamphos*, an incorrect subsequent spelling of *Coracia melanoramphos* Vieillot, 1817, has also been in prevailing use for the type species of the type genus of CORCORACIDAE for over 50 years. Deeming *melanorhamphos* as the correct original spelling under Article 81.1 and in accordance with Article 33.3.1 will also maintain stability in nomenclature.

Keywords. Nomenclature; taxonomy; Aves; CORCORACIDAE; STRUTHIDEIDAE; *melanoramphos*, *melanorhamphos*, *melanorhamphus*, Australian mudnesters; Australia.

1. The endemic Australian mudnesters are a group of communal songbirds that build cup-shaped nests of mud in trees. Morphological, behavioural and DNA sequence information gathered over the last 60 years shows, by consensus, that they comprise two monospecific genera, *Corcorax* Lesson, 1831 and *Struthidea* Gould, 1837. Their species, moreover, are together so distinct from other songbird lineages that they have been placed in their own family, CORCORACIDAE (data in Amadon, 1950; Mayr, 1963; Sibley & Ahlquist, 1985, 1990; Baverstock et al., 1992; Schodde & Mason, 1999; Barker et al., 2002, 2004; Ericson et al., 2002; Norman et al., 2009; Jönsson et al., 2011).

2. Two family-group names are available for the mudnesters. First published was STRUTHIDEIDAE Mathews, 1924 (p. 218) in the original spelling STRUTHIIDIDAE, corrected here under Article 32.5.3.1 of the Code. It is based by reference on *Struthidea* Gould, 1837 (type species: *Struthidea cinerea* Gould, 1837). The other is CORCORACIDAE Mathews, 1927 (p. 413) in the original spelling CORCORACIIDIDAE, corrected here under Article 32.5.3.1 of the Code. It is based by reference on *Corcorax* Lesson, 1831 (type species: *Corcorax australis* Lesson, 1831 = *Coracia melanorhamphos* Vieillot, 1817). *Corcorax* and *C. australis* were published available together on pp. 324–325 in livraison 5 of Lesson's two volume *Traité d'Ornithologie*, dated 1831. Nevertheless, their year of publication has been cited as 1830 by Mathews (1913, p. 317; 1927, pp. 413, 414), the R.A.O.U. Checklist Committee (1926, p. 113), Mayr (1962, p. 160) and Dickinson (2003, p. 515). This date comes from Mathews who earlier (1911, p.14) listed the dates of issue of the livraisons of Lesson's work from the *Bibliographie de la France*. Although livraisons 1–4 appeared between 13 February and 25 September 1830 and livraisons 6–8 between 1 March and 11 June 1831, no precise date is recorded for livraison 5 anywhere (Zimmer, 1926, pp. 387–388; Dickinson et al., 2011, p. 119). Mathews (1927, pp. 413–414) cites '(Dec.) 1830', but, despite the logic, that can only be a guess. In accord with Article 21.2 of the Code, we therefore use and advocate 1831 as the date of publication of *Corcorax* Lesson and *Corcorax australis* Lesson because that is the date on the title page of the work in which they were first published.

3. *Corcorax* and *Struthidea* first began to be associated in their own family-group from the mid 20th century on, following a review by Mayr (1963). From the beginning, the name used has been CORCORACIDAE, even though junior (McGill, 1960, p. 49; Mayr, 1962, p. 160). CORCORACIDAE was preferred by Mayr (1962) for the Harvard *Check-List of Birds of the World* and expressly advocated by Bock (1994, p. 221) in his compendium of avian family-group names. Although their approach was contrary to the law of priority, it has been accepted in ornithology. CORCORACIDAE has now been employed almost exclusively for the group over the last 50 years to 2013. For that period, the Commission Secretariat holds a submitted list of 84 usages of CORCORACIDAE in major Australian and global handbooks and checklists, Australian field guides and atlases, significant scientific papers and other reference and technical works. These do not include the multitude of usages in minor provincial journals and lists in Australia. Even where *Struthidea* and *Corcorax* are separated in subfamilies (e.g. Wolters, 1977, p. 220), CORCORACIDAE has been given precedence as the family name.

4. Until the turn of the 21st century, the senior name STRUTHIDEIDAE appears to have been used only once, by Condon (1968, p. 103). Since then, however, it has

appeared in one more printed work that we know of, in the account of the Australian mudnesters in the influential *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (Rowley & Russell, 2009, p. 272). Changing from such a long-accepted and familiar name as CORCORACIDAE to the unfamiliar STRUTHIDEIDAE, as could follow from Rowley & Russell's (2009) action, would disrupt and destabilise nomenclature for this distinctive family and potentially confound names for it in literature. This is already happening in the electronic media. Although CORCORACIDAE is the only name that currently accesses the family in Google searches, present entries in a widely used reference, Wikipedia, can confuse. It recognises STRUTHIDEIDAE as the senior name for the family but cites CORCORACIDAE as the commonly used name as well, and employs both as entry family-group names to Wikipedia's page on mudnesters. Implicit here is acknowledgement that CORCORACIDAE is the name in prevailing use.

5. The valid specific name for the type species of the type genus of CORCORACIDAE is *Corcorax melanoramphos* (Vieillot, 1817). In the original publication, Vieillot (1817, p. 2) made the specific name available, with description, as *melanoramphos* in the binomen *Coracia melanoramphos*. Here, however, we use and advocate the spelling *melanoramphos* as directed by Article 33.3.1 of the Code. Spellings of the name have been various. G.R. Gray (1846, text to plate lxxviii) was the first to appreciate the priority of Vieillot's name, but he quoted it as '*melanorhynchus*' in a straight-forward mis-transcription. Jean Cabanis (1851, p. 228) realised the error but emended it unjustifiably to *melanoramphus*, citing Vieillot's spelling in synonymy. Gould (1965, p. 470), Sharpe (1877, p. 149), the R.A.O.U. Checklist Committee (1926, p. 113) and Australian literature followed his lead. Then Amadon (1950, p. 126) and Mayr (1962, p. 160) 'corrected' it again, this time to '*melanoramphos*', compounding an unjustifiable emendation with another incorrect subsequent spelling.

6. Nevertheless, the spelling *melanoramphos* has been adopted almost universally over the 50 years since. It has been used not only in global and Australian checklists, hand-books, field guides and regional lists, but also in hundreds of regional Australian papers dealing with the distribution and behaviour of this species in Australian ornithological journals and newsletters. It has even been used in posters of Australian birds for public education. In the 84 references that we have lodged with the Commission to demonstrate usage of CORCORACIDAE or CORCORACINAE (see paragraph 3 above), 66 employ the species name in the spelling *melanoramphos*. Of the remainder, 11 do not refer to the species at all, 2 revert to the emendation *melanoramphus*, and only 5 (Poiani & Jermin, 1994; Ericson et al., 2002; Rowley & Russell, 2009; Jønsson et al., 2011; TiF Checklist, 2013) use the original spelling *melanoramphos*. On the electronic search engine Google Scholar, we have recorded 468 usages of the spelling *melanoramphos* to 17 of the original spelling *melanoramphos*. Within the last ten years the proportion recorded for *melanoramphos* in that source has risen slightly, at 14 compared to 346 for *melanoramphos*; some of them appear to be mis-spellings for *melanoramphos* (e.g. Hobbs, 2002; Ericson et al., 2002).

7. In 2009, however, the account of mudnesters in the influential *Handbook of the Birds of the World* intentionally returned to the original spelling *melanoramphos* (Rowley & Russell, 2009, pp. 272–285). Following that action there has been some uptake of that spelling in the electronic media. It is used, for example, on the websites Avibase (2013) and TiF Checklist (2013) and, until September 2013, on the

International Ornithological Union's world species list (Gill & Donsker, 2012; see below). Spellings in the electronic record may be reversed at the press of a button, but those in baseline hard-copy references are rarely changed in less than a decade. It is the confusion caused by that lag which concerns us, as well as a shift in spelling of a familiar, in-use name that, because of its subtlety, will not be easy for anyone other than a language scholar. In Australia, national and state government and non-government instrumentalities, professional biologists, amateur naturalists and wildlife managers all use the following hard-copy checklists and manuals as their nomenclatural references: Christidis & Boles (1994, 2008), Schodde & Mason (1999) and Birds Australia's *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* (1990–2006). Each of these works employs the spelling *melanorhamphos*. It is a spelling that will remain in use for some years to come because no new editions are impending.

8. Due to these circumstances, we placed the issue before the Research Coordinating Committee on Avian Nomenclature (formerly Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature) of the International Ornithological Union for advice. We have also liaised, through that committee, with the Union's group that provides a nomenclatural reference list for the bird species of the world on the internet. The Research Coordinating Committee voted 8 to 2 in favour of preserving the in-use spelling *melanorhamphos*. The International Ornithological Union's species list has also reversed its uptake of the original spelling and, aware of this application to the Commission, currently employs *melanorhamphos* in accord with Article 82.1 (Gill & Donsker, 2013).

9. In conclusion, we stress that we have deep respect for the law of priority and have not drawn up this application lightly. Guided by the third paragraph of the Code's Preamble, however, we consider that stability will be affected, in this particular case, if the priority of STRUTHIDEIDAE and original spelling of *melanoramphos* are allowed to stand, particularly in Australia where the mudnesters are not only endemic but also familiar and popular birds.

10. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is accordingly asked:

- (1) to use its plenary power:
 - (a) to give the name CORCORACIDAE Mathews, 1927 precedence over STRUTHIDEIDAE Mathews, 1924, whenever the two are considered to be synonyms;
 - (b) to rule that the spelling *melanorhamphos* is the correct original spelling of the specific name of the type species of the type genus of CORCORACIDAE Mathews, 1927;
- (2) to place on the Official List of Family-Group Names in Zoology the following names:
 - (a) CORCORACIDAE Mathews, 1927, type genus *Corcorax* Lesson, 1831, with the endorsement that it is to be given precedence over the name STRUTHIDEIDAE Mathews, 1924 whenever the two are considered to be synonyms, as ruled in (1)(a) above;
 - (b) STRUTHIDEIDAE Mathews, 1924, type genus *Struthidea* Gould, 1837, with the endorsement that it is not to be given priority over the name CORCORACIDAE Mathews, 1927, whenever the two are considered to be synonyms, as ruled in (1)(a) above;

- (3) to place on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology the following names:
- (a) *Corcorax* Lesson, 1831 (gender: masculine), type species by monotypy *Corcorax australis* Lesson, 1831;
 - (b) *Struthidea* Gould, 1837 (gender: feminine), type species by monotypy *Struthidea cinerea* Gould, 1837;
- (4) to place on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology the following names:
- (a) *melanoramphos* Vieillot, 1817, as published in the binomen *Coracia melanoramphos*, correct original spelling of the name of the type species of *Corcorax* Lesson, 1831, as ruled in (1)(b) above;
 - (b) *cinerea* Gould, 1837, as published in the binomen *Struthidea cinerea*, the specific name of the type species of the genus *Struthidea* Gould, 1837;
- (5) to place on the Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Names in Zoology the following names:
- (a) *melanoramphos* Vieillot, 1817, as published in the binomen *Coracia melanoramphos*, incorrect original spelling of the name of the type species of *Corcorax* Lesson, 1831;
 - (b) *melanoramphus* Cabanis, 1851, as published in the binomen *Cercoronis melanoramphus*, unjustified emendation of the specific name of *Coracia melanoramphos* Vieillot, 1817.

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